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A SOVIET VIEW OF U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

by

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A SOVIET VIEW OF U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

A Review Essay of

Genrikh Trofimenko's The U.S. Military Doctrine
Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986, 222 pp.

by

James John Tritten

The U.S. Military Doctrine is a book by a Soviet world-class specialist in international relations and the United States who is currently chief of the Foreign Policy Department at the Institute of the U.S. and Canadian Studies in Moscow. The book has been translated into English at a time when the Soviet Union is undergoing a major debate in the future of their military doctrine and strategy.

The primary worth to American readers of The U.S. Military Doctrine is to gain an insight into the position of the Soviet civilian academic community and think tanks into this debate. Henry Trofimenko has been studying the U.S. for over thirty years and uses this book to set forth enduring qualities of U.S. military doctrine. The book thus represents Professor Trofimenko's views of the American threat and from these views we should be able to ascertain whether or not the author inflates that threat or joins the ranks of those who see an accommodation with the West as being possible.

Whereas the Soviets are comfortable with the concept of military doctrine, Professor Trofimenko recognizes that this term has been ignored and even rejected in the U.S., Americans prefer to use the terms grand strategy, national security strategy, or

national strategy to discuss the concepts of military doctrine. Trofimenko defines military doctrine as a "system of views... concerning the essence, purpose, and character of a possible future war, preparation for it on the part of the nations and its armed forces, as well as the ways of waging it."

Henry Trofimenko adopts the standard Soviet model by rejecting the Western concept that war is synonymous with armed conflict. The Soviets always include the political, psychological, economic, scientific, technological, and geographic aspects of war and not merely the clash between the armed forces. In doing so, they demonstrate that they have a different strategic culture than that of the U.S.

Some of the different aspects of American strategic culture, according to Trofimenko, are due to the fact that the continental U.S. has not had to be seriously defended since the American Revolution. Despite these and other minor historical inaccuracies and a healthy dose of rhetoric, the author attempts to review those major forces that have helped shape the way Americans think about national security and defense.

According to Professor Trofimenko, the attainment of strategic military parity between the superpowers "acts as a check on the aggressive intentions of certain Western circles. Another restraining factor is the growing awareness and political activity of the popular masses." He does acknowledge, however, that the attainment of a "position of strength" allows nations to dominate the escalation decision. According to Trofimenko,

having a "free hand in world affairs was a major U.S. strategic goal" following the end of World War II.

Trofimenko's views on some topical issues bear special mention. For example, he correctly points out that, since 1950 and NSC 68, the Americans have thought about, and attempted, competitive strategies vis-a-vis the USSR. He also states that "pure isolationism has never existed in the United States at all," but rather that "intervention and expansion...has been going on in the U.S. ruling elite for 200 years now." Such comments support a continuation of the Soviet view that they are engaged in a long-term struggle with capitalism and that this struggle exists despite the temporary absence of armed conflict. Trofimenko views one long-term American goal as being to "'transform' the Soviet Union's internal system."

Although the author fails to account for the Soviet build-up of nationwide active and passive defenses (thus demonstrating their rejection of vulnerability to nuclear retaliation as a principle of military doctrine) and rejection for such concepts in their political-military literature, Trofimenko attempts to argue that mutual assured destruction (MAD) defines the actual state of the superpowers' nuclear forces today. He correctly argues that a proper net assessment of these forces is not a mere tallying of "the number of strategic launchers but in the actual combat capabilities of strategic forces on both sides." Perhaps such comments mean that he is aligning himself with those forces within the USSR that are arguing for less emphasis, in the short

term, on defense since the Soviets obviously have capabilities that far exceed that which is required for a MAD environment.

Trofimenko states that "MAD is anything but an ideal situation but currently, in the absence of any other realistic alternative to mutual deterrence...it is the best basis for preserving strategic stability." Given that nations do not seek to preserve stability once engaged in an armed conflict, that the Soviet Union is obviously an expansionist power, and that Trofimenko argues that the U.S. is a non-status quo power, then why does he argue that MAD is an acceptable means to such an obviously flawed goal? The general Soviet view of stability is that it cannot be achieved until the Soviets have control over all possible enemies.

One of the enduring qualities of U.S. military doctrine, according to the author, is the constant resort to "psychological and direct--that is, physical--use of armed force by the United States" to achieve political goals. Trofimenko uses a historical surrogate to argue that the aim of the United States in any war with the Soviet Union would be the "elimination of Soviet government in the USSR." On the other hand, Trofimenko states that the American view of war is to regard it "as a political tool, and hostilities as a means of securing this or that political objective by depriving the enemy of the will to resist." Both options should clearly be open to the United States when attempting to terminate a war with the USSR.

The debate over "how much is enough?" is addressed by Trofimenko by referring to the topical term "sufficiency." Americans, according to the author, require a military machine that is "absolutely and wholly superior to the armed forces of other nations." This, of course, is a description of the existing Soviet view of "sufficiency," a term that is currently undergoing internal debate. The United States has never fielded a military force capable of action against all possible enemies except for time of grave national emergency such as during World War II.

We are tantalized only briefly with his views on the current debate over whether or not the Soviet military should redefine its needs to the more likely threats rather than against all enemies. Trofimenko does so by stating that "deterrence through dissuasion, that is at preventing nuclear war" is the cornerstone of Soviet military doctrine. Such a doctrine rejects the concept of deterrence by threat of punishment and the mutual vulnerability required under MAD.

Opinions are offered by Trofimenko on whether or not damage limiting first strikes, a frequent theme in the Soviet military literature, is an acceptable military strategy. He speaks of such theory as being found in American doctrine and justified by the concept of a "just" war. In reality, first strike damage limitation and "just" wars are Soviet concepts found frequently in their military literature. American literature most often discusses retaliation and punishment rather than deterrence by the capability to deny.

Trofimenko accords nuclear weapons a political utility in that they restrain aggression by the West. His views on U.S. targeting with its nuclear forces includes military and not civilian targets; i.e. targeting that supports deterrence by denial and not punishment. He states that the Reagan administration nuclear buildup is a continuation of normal U.S. military politics in support of the American bias to solve international political problems with military forces.

The author makes a number of comments on the inability of the American public and leadership to understand great issues of strategy and defense. For example, he says that "in any Congress, no more than fifteen people can lay claim to any real competence in matters concerning the world military balance and weapons systems." "It took U.S. strategists and theorists almost thirty years to really sort out the military, technological and sociopolitical issues of nuclear war; it would not be exaggeration to say that some aspects of the nuclear missile strategy are not clear to them to this day."

Additional passages lead one to suspect that some of these comments are perhaps more a surrogate for internal consumption than actual findings of U.S. strategic-military culture. For example, Trofimenko states that "American strategic thought would have made no progress had it not been bolstered by the work of civilian strategists from the so-called think tanks." Furthermore, he claims that "up to the end of World War II, the U.S. military establishment produced only one outstanding theorist-- Captain (later Rear Admiral) Alfred Thayer Mahan."

Trofimenko praises American strategic concepts of containing Imperial Russia by preventing expansion on the flanks and at sea. On the other hand, he dismisses former Secretary of Defense Weinberger's concepts of "geographic escalation...as ravings of an irrational mind." Interestingly, Trofimenko acknowledges that a nation "would be able to resort to this war-widening strategy only if it attains superiority in strategic nuclear armaments."

Almost as an afterthought, Professor Trofimenko adds to the end of the book a discussion of navies and the "Blue water" strategy. The author presents his view of the American naval threat to the Soviet Union. We can contrast them with similar themes found in Soviet naval literature and with the declaratory U.S. Maritime Strategy. In all of these, the major naval threat to the USSR is that to Soviet ballistic missile submarines.

What is important to note, however, is what is not said by Trofimenko in his book. For example, he does not warn that conventional attacks against nuclear assets at sea will automatically result in vertical escalation to nuclear warfare. When this reviewer met with Trofimenko on a panel earlier this year, he did not support such views when they were made by other participants.

Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Sergei Gorshkov's book The Sea Power of the State is cited as evidence that the Soviet Navy's deterrent role has been significant. One can certainly argue with this position but the fact that the

politically astute Trofimenko cited Gorskov gives us a clue to the late admiral's status following his 1985 retirement.

The bottom line recommendation for this book is that it is a must for all serious students of the Soviet Union or American defense issues. The book has been translated by the Soviets into numerous languages, with each edition specially tailored to the target region. It thus serves functions in the Soviet propaganda campaign but also to gain an insight into the Soviet mind and the internal debate whose outcome we all await. In the interests of peace and understanding, it would be helpful if the USSR could provide us with similar materials on the Soviet views of their own military doctrine and strategy.

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